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**Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related
forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation
of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action**

Written statement* submitted by Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Institutional racism and discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece

Principle of equality and non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to education is a key to securing equal access to quality education for persons belonging to minority groups. The status of the Turkish community in Western Thrace, Greece and the Greek community in Istanbul, Turkey is established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 and their rights were guaranteed by several bilateral and multilateral agreements.

The Turkish community in Western Thrace¹, Greece is granted with the right to education in its mother tongue and autonomy in the management of its educational institutions with the Treaty of Lausanne. However, Greek authorities have wide-ranging control over minority schools at all levels, whether it concerns the composition and the functioning of the school boards, the hiring and firing of teachers, the distribution of textbooks or the building and repair of school buildings.

The Turkish community has the right to establish private and public schools, but in practice this division between public and private schooling is not implemented. In practice, Turkish schools are registered as private schools, but are under the direct control of the state, while a complex system of legal provisions governs their establishment and operation. Although the Turkish primary schools are autonomous, the government, as part of the austerity measures taken in 2010, has suspended the activities of Turkish primary schools temporarily under the pretext of lesser number of students. In practice Turkish primary schools, which are stated to be suspended temporarily have been closed. This practice has become a tool of systematic discrimination against the Turkish community in Western Thrace.

There were 194 Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace with courses taught in both Turkish and Greek, when the former United Nations Independent Expert on Minority Issues carried out a fact-finding mission in 2008. The primary schools decreased to 188 in 2011, 170 in 2014, and 164 in 2015 and 133 in 2016 and 130 in 2017, 128 in 2018 and 123 in 2019 due to the closure of Turkish primary schools on grounds of austerity measures on closing of schools with number of students less than 9.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, the Ministry of Education decided closing of eight additional Turkish primary schools in Uysallı (İsalo), Bekirköy (Velkio), Menetler (Skaloma) and Kozlardere (Linos) villages in Rhodope (Rodop), İnhanlı (Evlalo) and Höyükköy (Velochoori) Turkish primary schools in Xanthi (İskeçe) and Babalar (Goniko) and Taşağıl (Petrolofos) in Evros (Meriç). Thus, the total number of Turkish primary schools will drop to 115 this year from 123.

In response to a question, the kin-state Turkey criticized closing of Turkish primary schools in Western Thrace on 12 August 2020² and commented that this practice by Greece is a part of the assimilation and oppression efforts towards the Turkish community. Turkey asked Greece to cease its systematic policy, which is not compatible with the Lausanne Peace Treaty, hindering the education of the children of the Minority, and re-open the schools it has closed. On the same day, Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs made an announcement regarding statement by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and claimed that educational policies of the Greek State are planned and implemented to all Greek citizens alike with no exception or discrimination, based solely on the quality of the education provided and the interests of pupils.³

Another state intervention to the education of the Turkish community is that operation and functioning of the school councils in historically religious schools, madrasas, in Rhodope and

¹ The status of the Turkish Minority of Western Thrace was established by the Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923. However, the Greek government officially recognizes only a “Muslim minority in Thrace” and denies existence of an ethnic Turkish minority in the country.

² http://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc_-75_-yunanistan-in-bati-trakya-turk-azinligina-ait-ilkokullari-sistematik-olarak-kapatma-politikasi-hk-sc.en.mfa#.

³ <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-announcement-regarding-todays-statement-by-the-turkish-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-on-muslim-minority-schools-in-thrace.html>.

Xanthi has drastically been changed. Madrasas are educational institutions in Western Thrace which provides education on religious studies and training for religious clergy like imams, muezzins, preachers and muftis. These religious schools belong to the Turkish community in Western Thrace alike other Turkish schools in the region and have secondary school status. Students are taught in Greek, Arabic, English and Turkish, but the number of subjects taught in Turkish has been reduced over time. Students in the religious school in Rhodope staged a two-day boycott in 2018, when a ministerial decree was issued to reduce Turkish language lessons and Islamic teachings at the school.⁴

Law 4713/2020 on Improving Special Education and Other Emergency Provisions drafted by the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs dated 29 July 2020 is another direct state intervention to the operation of religious schools in the region. Article 32 has amended Law 2621/1998 with new provisions on composition and functioning of the School Council and envisaged the introduction of government-appointed acting muftis, who are not recognised by the Turkish community, to the presidency of the school councils of two madrasahs in Rhodope and Xanthi. Furthermore, the school council's powers, all kinds of economic, administrative and working methods will be determined by the decision of the Minister of Education.

Furthermore, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Interior announced in a joint decision on July, 31 that 120 religious instructors will be appointed to madrasas in Rhodope and Xanthi under Law 4115/2013 which envisages appointment of Islamic religious instructors to teach Islam to the children belonging to the Turkish community in Greek-language public primary and secondary schools and mosques in Western Thrace under the auspices of the government-appointed muftis.

ABTTF would like to remind that religious schools in Rhodope and Xanthi are secondary schools belonging to the Turkish community. These schools are not public schools and the Greek government cannot appoint religious instructors to the two madrasas. That is why the Ministry of Education ordered on August 13, 2020 that the official name of madrasas in Rhodope and Xanthi should be written in all correspondences as the "Muslim madrasa" instead of minority madrasa.⁵ This means that the minority school status of the two religious schools in Rhodope and Xanthi is being removed in stark violation of the autonomy granted in education by international treaties.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne determined the status and rights to the Turkish community in Western Thrace and the Greek community in Turkey on the basis of the principle of reciprocity. Historically, the Turks of Western Thrace were seen as reminiscent of the era of Ottoman yoke. Such views have produced an understanding of minorities as "Trojan horses" which are seen as hindrances to national unity and integrity as well as public order.

In a period of deteriorating bilateral relations between the kin-state Turkey and Greece due to the political tensions in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, further state intervention to the minority education as an act of intimidation and pressure against the Turkish community has caused great reaction among Turkish institutions and civil society organizations in the region.

During this period of tense relations between two countries, a military unit affiliated to the 4th Corps in İskeçe (Xanthi) carried out a military exercise and training on the streets in Gökçepınar (Glafki), one of the Turkish villages in Western Thrace on August 12, 2020. No information was given to the people of the village beforehand and residents and children of the village had a great fear when they faced with armed soldiers on the streets when they left their homes in the morning.⁶ There was also military activity yesterday in Şahin (Echinos), another Turkish village in Xanthi on the same day. Military vehicles came to the entrance of the village and left after being deployed there for a while.⁷

Although members of the Turkish community in Western Thrace are Greek citizens, as the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) notes in its annual report released in June, there

⁴ https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MRG_Rep_WThrace_EN_Sept19.pdf.

⁵ <http://birlikgazetesi.org/micotakis-hukumetine-bati-trakyada-tepkiler-devam-ediyor/>.

⁶ <https://tvxs.gr/news/ellada/antidraseis-gia-askisi-komantos-se-meionotiko-xorio-tis-thrakis-kathisyxazei-o-stratos>.

⁷ <https://gundemgazetesi.com/haber/detay/7773>.

is a trend in incidents of everyday racist violence which describes the expression of racist behaviours or even racist violence, usually of low intensity, expressed by individuals in the context of everyday life: in public transport, at school, at work, in public services against Greek citizens targeted them as «less» Greeks on grounds of ethnic origin.⁸ Racist rhetoric at central and local political levels played a key role in the development of racist attitudes and prejudices, and significantly contributed to the normalization of xenophobia and intolerance which is further aggravated by institutional racism.

We call on Greek authorities to:

1. restore autonomy in education granted to the Turkish community in Western Thrace by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty in full compliance with the special status of the Turkish community in education,
 2. annul the decision on closure of Turkish primary schools on economic grounds,
 3. annul the relevant article on the composition and operation of school councils in religious schools belonging to the Turkish community
 4. end systematic and institutional discrimination and racism against the Turkish community in Western Thrace.
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⁸ <http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ETHSIA-EKTHESH-2019-english.pdf>.